**The Author and Date of Writing**

For such a short Book, James generates more than his fair share of argument and controversy over authorship, date of writing and even whether it should be included in the canon of literature. Yet, it is included and given the statement of **2 Timothy 3:16**, it requires our close consideration.

The first controversy starts with the author, as there are several persons named James mentioned in the NT(see end for references). James as a name is Greek in origin, but it is derived from the Hebrew, Jacob. Without going over the numerous arguments that have been offered over the centuries, the writer of this letter is widely accepted as being the James mentioned in **Matthew 13:55**, as being one of the brothers of Jesus. After the establishment of the early church, James emerges as one of the leaders **Acts 15:13**.

The book is written to the ‘12 tribes scattered among the nations’ – meaning the Jewish believers living in their communities around the Mediterranean. Judaism has spread across the region through natural migration around the time of Jesus’ birth and it was within these people that the Good News was accepted. This migration was often economic in nature, as the Jewish people saw opportunities to trade.

As the new faith progressed there were often doctrinal differences between the existing customs of Judaism and Gentile worship. Questions arose, which when not dealt properly, allowed false teachers to move in. James’ letter, as well as the teachings of the other NT writers, sought to correct such deviation from God’s truth about salvation through His Messiah.

Arguments around the date of writing vary between one of the earliest Books to be written, to something that emerged some 20 years later. Some argue the Book pre-dates the Council of Jerusalem **Acts 15**, which took place in 46AD, based on the lack of any mention of Jewish-Gentile tension that crept into the church during the early years, which in turn led to the Council, at which James was both present and an active participant. Conversely, some argue this means an early date as these doctrinal issues had yet to arise, but others argue a late writing date, stating the issues were by then completely resolved and needed no further mention.

Other arguments to support dates revolve around the meeting place of the Church. **James 2:2** in some translations states the meeting place is the *sunagoge*, suggesting an earlier time, rather than later which would have used the Greek word *ekklesia*, as the Jewish word was being dropped. However, whilst elders are mentioned **5:14**, deacons and bishops are not, suggesting an early date. The inclusion of teachers in **3:1** further complicates the dating process, as some translations talk about many teachers, which has been variously interpreted as numerous, in terms of an unstructured system, but also many doctrines, meaning falsehood. The former would suggest early, the latter date involving false teachers would suggest a later date.

Having outlined the problems, there is a general (not complete) consensus, that James wrote his Book around AD62 and its aim is to deal with the various shortcomings and sins that each member had introduced into the Church. It is suggested that rather than being a work that speaks of the glory of the risen Jesus, that typified early writings, this Book has been written to deal with the imperfections of the Church, which emerged later.

The Book deals with the differing attitudes presented when those who are rich and poor enter the Church and in doing so, condemns the double-standards **2:1-3, 5:1-6**. These issues were not apparent within the early church **1 Corinthians 1:26-27**, suggesting a later writing date. In some respects the date argument is something that detracts from the real message that James is trying to convey.

**Purpose of the Book**

This Book contains much that is of a practical and service nature, so it is fitting that James starts his Book using the term bond-servant of God. He encourages his readers to produce fruit worthy of God’s calling and he is equally critical of those who are hypocritical in their behaviour. James lays out much in terms of wisdom to strengthen the faith of believers, whilst acknowledging there will be trials too **3:2**.

**James 1:1 - James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.**

Majority opinion - author is James:

* Half-brother of Jesus **Matthew 13:55**
* Leader of the early Jerusalem church **Acts 15:13** and brother of **Jude**.
* He has undergone a conversion since Jesus’ death – he appeared unsupportive of Jesus’ message and mission **John 7:5**, but maybe changed after the resurrection 1 Corinthians 15:7, as Jesus appeared to him.

**Servant (bondservant)** – same phrase that Paul uses of himself.

* Possibly no more introduction - the half-brother of Jesus needs no further self-introduction.
* Being Jesus’ brother had less importance than having Jesus as his Lord.
* **Bondservant** - Greek doulos better translated as slave. “A slave, a bondservant, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another... Among the Greeks, with their strong sense of personal freedom, the term carried a degrading connotation.” (Hiebert)

**Lord** - Greek kurios - the master of a doulos. In this context James considered Jesus God.

**To the twelve tribes** – the phrase is difficult to interpret.

* Did James write to all Christians, or just those from a Jewish background? It is relevant to all Christians – possibly James probably wrote his letter before Gentiles were brought into the church (or before they were in any great number).
* It is a Jewish figure of speech used for the Jewish people as a whole **Matthew 19:28**. Paul used the phrase when speaking to King Agrippa **Acts 26:7**. The Jewish people retained a strong concept of the ‘twelve tribes’, though they had not existed as such for many centuries.

**Scattered among the nations** – the Jewish people were spread widely across the entire Mediterranean region – driven at differing times by exile, persecution and economic opportunity. Into these communities the Jewish Christians converts had arrived, to be followed later by the Gentile convers.

**Greetings** - the customary Greek way of opening a letter (not used by Paul).

**James 1:2-4 - 2Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds 3because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**

* James considered trials as being inevitable, but they should be occasions for **joy**, not discouragement, because we are told they produce perseverance.
* **Trials** ‘signifies affliction, persecution, or trial of any kind (in this case not including temptation)’ (Clarke)
* **When you face** – implies you are surrounded and there is no escaping them - **Psalm 116:3**.
* **Perseverance (patience)** - Greek means active endurance to keep going for the long run, rather than just a few minutes. It pictures someone under a heavy load and choosing to stay there instead of trying to escape.
* **…the testing of your faith produces perseverance** - Faith does not produce trials – it is tested through trials. Trials reveal what faith we do have – to us, as God already knows how much faith we have. Faith is precious, so it is tested thoroughly. ‘Faith is as vital to salvation as the heart is vital to the body: hence the javelins of the enemy are mainly aimed at this essential grace.’ (Spurgeon)
* Trials do not produce faith – **Romans 10:17 …faith comes by hearing the Word of God**.

**Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything** - perseverance is a slow process and comes slowly. Possibly the phrase is taken from Greek games, where the winner of the pentathlon was considered ‘complete’ or perfect. Alternatively, it is the perfect sacrificial animal ‘**complete, lacking nothing’** that was fit to offer God. Either way, there had been testing and approval.

‘Trials can prove a wonderful work of God in us. I have looked back to times of trial with a kind of longing, not to have them return, but to feel the strength of God as I have felt it then, to feel the power of faith, as I have felt it then, to hang upon God’s powerful arm as I hung upon it then, and to see God at work as I saw him then.’ (Spurgeon)

**James 1:5-8 - 5If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.**

**If any of you lacks wisdom** - Trials should make us seek God’s wisdom as to how we should continue. This is not just knowledge, wisdom allows us to use knowledge and move forward in faith with God’s support.

**…ask God** – Wisdom is from **God**, not anyone or anything else, who will give us more than we could ever believe possible. True wisdom will always be consistent with God’s word – found in the Bible.

**…without finding fault** – God’s blessings are unlimited, so we should continually ask Him to add new wisdom daily. God’s generosity is unlimited – consider **John 3:16**.

**But when you ask, you must believe** - request for wisdom must be made in faith, not doubting God’s ability or desire to give us His wisdom.

**…like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind** – ‘the doubter is without rest, unstable, driven by winds and capable of great destruction – as is the wave of the sea.’ (Guzik)

**…double-minded** – to ask God for something, but also to doubt, shows a lack of faith. If we had no faith, we would never ask, nor would we have doubt. Being double-minded is literally two-souled. ‘The man of two souls, who has one for the earth, and another for heaven: who wishes to secure both worlds; he will not give up earth and he is loath to let heaven go.’ (Clarke)

The man who said to Jesus, **‘ Lord, I believe, help my unbelief…’ Mark 9:24**, was not **double-minded**. He wanted to believe and declared his belief – it was his faith that was weak, but it didn’t have doubt.

‘Do you believe that God can give you wisdom, and that he will do so if you ask him? Then, go at once to him, and say, ‘Lord, this is what I need.’ Specify your wants, state your exact condition, lay the whole case before God with as much orderliness as if you were telling your story to an intelligent friend who was willing to hear it, and prepared to help you; and then say, ‘Lord, this is specifically what I think I want; and I ask this of thee believing that thou canst give it to me.'’ (Spurgeon)

**James 1:9-11 - 9Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. 10But the rich should take pride in their humiliation – since they will pass away like a wild flower. 11For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.**

With this verse, James changes his subject, from trials and wisdom to riches and humility, becoming more like an extension of the Book of Proverbs or other Old Testament wisdom literature. In that setting, the subject matter can jump from topic to topic and back again to a previous topic.

**Believers in humble circumstance ought to take pride in their high position…** - everyone should rejoice that they have been accepted by God and when they go through trials, but James is saying it is harder for the rich to rejoice in the same circumstances.

‘As the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches. By faith in Christ the two are equals.’ (Hiebert)

**…since they will pass away like a flower** – inevitably for all of us, rich or poor, this life is still only the earthly life and it is short. Whilst the rich may have comfort in this life, it is as fleeting as that of the flowers.

The riches of this world will one day **fade away**, however, James says that the **rich will fade away**. ‘If we put our life and our identity into things that **fade away**, we will **fade away** also – much better to put our life and our identity into things that will never fade! If a man is only rich in this world, when he dies, he leaves his riches. But if a man is rich before God, when he dies, he goes to his riches.’ (Guzik)

**James 1:12 - 12Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.**

**Blessed is the one… -** This has the sound of one of Jesus’ Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount **Matthew 5-7**, which is cited as being an argument that James was close to Jesus. But here, like Jesus, James tells us how we can persevere when going through trials.

‘It does not say, “Blessed is the man who is never tempted.” Nor does it say, “Blessed is the man who finds all temptation easy to conquer.” Instead the promise of blessedness is given to the one who **endures temptation**. There is a special gift of blessedness from God to the one who can say “no” to temptation, thereby saying “yes” to God.’ (Guzik)

The reward for perseverance is **the crown of life that the Lord has promised…** - James Is assuring us that there is a reward from God Himself for those who pass this trial.

**…to those who love Him** – this is a pre-requisite and motivation for resisting temptation. ‘Our passion of sinful temptation can only really be overcome by a greater passion; for the honour and glory and relationship with God.’ (Guzik)

‘…those who endure temptation rightly, endure it because they love God. They say to themselves, ‘How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?’ They cannot fall into sin because it would grieve him who loves them so well and whom they love with all their hearts.” (Spurgeon)

**James 1:13-16 - 13When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. 16Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.**

**…no one should say, ‘God is tempting me’… nor does He tempt anyone**.**. -** Temptation does not come from God, though He does seem to allow it. James saw that people tend to blame God when they are in trials. Yet, God’s very nature means He is unable to tempt or be tempted (in the sense we are tempted, as James will explain).

‘God sometimes allows great tests to come to His people:

* Abraham - **Genesis 22:1**
* Job’s affliction - **Job 1-2**
* Tests as a form of judgment upon those who have rejected Him, such as sending a spirit to bring deception **Kings 22:19-23**
* Departing from a man and refusing to answer him **Samuel 28:15-16**

Yet in no case does God entice a person to evil. ‘Satan tempts: God tries. But the same trial may be both a temptation and a trial; and it may be a trial from God’s side, and a temptation from Satan’s side, just as Job suffered from Satan, and it was a temptation; but he also suffered from God through Satan, and so it was a trial to him.’ (Spurgeon)

**…dragged away… -** temptation comes when we get **dragged away** from God’s way, to do our own will. ‘Satan certainly tempts us, but the only reason temptation has a hook in us is because of our own fallen nature, which corrupts our God-given desires. We often give Satan too much credit for his tempting powers and fail to recognise our own part in the matter.’ (Guzik)

**…after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin** – the result of this misdirected desire is sin, from which there is a natural progression to death, a deception that Satan tries to hide from us.

**Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters** – The deception is that our own desires will bring both life and long-term benefits for us. **John 10:10** says, **Satan only comes to steal, to kill and to destroy**. By remembering that, we can more effectively resist the deceptions of temptation.

**James 1:17-18 - 17Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits.**

**Every good and perfect gift is from above…** James is saying that in our fallen state we can only attempt to be good, but God the Father in Heaven, who is perfect, is able to supply goodness and blessings.

What is good? It needs to be judged on an eternal scale. Winning the lottery might have a great appeal, however, for many it has been a route to further problems in life. The only perfect gift comes from God – He knows what we want, but more importantly knows what we truly need.

**…who does not change like shifting shadows**. God is constant in everything that He is and does, which includes His provision of those good and perfect gifts. With God, there is no **shifting shadows** – His light is constant and unmoving, as James says, He is the **Father of heavenly lights**.

‘…the Greek is actually ‘the Father of the lights.’ The specific **lights** are the celestial bodies that light up the sky, both day and night. The sun and stars never stop giving light, even when we can’t see them. Even so, there is never a **shadow** with God. When night comes, the darkness isn’t the fault of the sun; it shines as brightly as before. Instead, the earth has turned from the sun and darkness comes.’ (Hiebert) This verse speaks against modern process theology, which says that God is ‘maturing’ and ‘growing’ Himself.

**He chose to give us birth through the word of truth**. James sates that salvation was given by God, through His Word. It is not earned by the work or obedience of man and it is God’s will that we should receive salvation. ‘God did to us all that has been done, without any incentive or prompting, moved only by himself, because he delighteth in mercy; because his name and his nature are love because evermore, like the sun, it is natural to him to distribute the beams of his eternal grace.” (Spurgeon)

**…that we might be a kind of firstfruits**. In our salvation we are the equivalent of a harvest – the firstfruits of the year’s harvest were celebrated and presented to God as a sign of gratitude **Deuteronomy 26:1-4** and anticipation of the remainder of the (greater) harvest.

There is a thought that James was referring to his own generation of believers when he calls them **firstfruits**, especially as being mainly written to Christians from a Jewish background. In terms of Deuteronomy, the subsequent and greater harvest would be the Christians from a Gentile background.

**James 1:19-21 - 19My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 21Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.**

**…everyone should be quick to listen and slow to become angry…** There appears to be a change of subject as James says we be self-controlled – to listen rather than speak, to be controlled rather than angry. ‘…hath not Nature taught us the same that the apostle here doth, by giving us two ears and those open; and but one tongue and that hedged in with teeth and lips?” (Trapp)

**…slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires**. James says that our anger isn’t developing us in bringing us closer to God – it almost always simply defends or promotes our own agenda.

It should be compared to the righteous anger that Jesus expressed when faced with injustice (the death of Lazarus **John 11**) or the non-observance of God’s laws (clearing the Temple **Matthew 21**).

**…get rid of moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent…** This is saying to exchange impure lifestyles of temptation, to take on the goodness of God. Get rid of is a strong statement – it is to dispose of something and to never go back to it.

**…humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you**. ‘The first thing, then, is receive (accept). It is a very instructive gospel word; it is the door through which God’s grace enters to us. We are not saved by working, but by receiving; not by what we give to God, but by what God gives to us, and we receive from him.’ (Spurgeon)

The word of God carries the power of God, **which can save you**.

**James 1:22-25 - 22Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do.**

**Do not merely listen to the word**… Some versions have **…be doers of the word and not hearers only**. Listening is not sufficient, we need to take some action over what we hear from God. ‘To take comfort in the fact you have heard God’s word when you haven’t done it is to deceive yourself.’ (Guzik)

In Jesus time, anyone could listen to people teaching, but if the person then followed that teacher and tried to live by what was taught, that gave brought the title of disciple. Jesus is looking for disciples: doers, not mere hearers.

Jesus made this point to conclude His Sermon on the Mount. He said that the one who heard the word without doing it was like a man who built his house on the sand, but the one who heard God’s word and did it was like a man whose house was built on a rock **Matthew 7:24-27**. The one who both heard and did God’s word could withstand the inevitable storms of life and the judgment of eternity.

‘I fear we have many such in all congregations; admiring hearers, affectionate hearers, attached hearers, but all the while unblessed hearers, because they are not doers of the word.’ (Spurgeon)

**Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like**. The person who only hears God’s word without doing it is like someone who has received information, but he immediately forgets it, so it is not going to have any benefit in his spiritual life.

Other translations have **observing** rather than looking. The Greek word includes careful scrutiny – James is implying that even those who scrutinise God’s word (Bible experts) may not be doers of the word.

**But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it... they will be blessed in what they do**. If we study the Word of God intently and do it (**continue in it**), then we will be **blessed**.

The Greek word translated **continues** includes the meaning of: ‘Takes time to see and examine the state of his soul, the grace of his God, the extent of his duty and the height of the promised glory.’ (Clarke)

**James 1:26-27 - 26Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 27Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.**

**Those who consider themselves religious…** James has explained that real religion is not shown by just hearing the word, but by doing it – and one way to do that is to **keep a tight rein on the tongue**.

…**religious**. The Greek word used here is never used in a positive way in the NT – **Acts 17:32, 25:19, 26:5, Colossian 2:23**. James uses it here as someone who has the outward appearance of being religious, but is not really right with God.

…**their religion is useless**. Your walk with God **is useless** if it does not translate into the way you live and the way you treat others. Many are deceived in their own heart regarding the reality of their walk with God.

Bearing in mind James would have been writing to communities that were potentially made up largely from Jewish converts, ‘…this seems to reflect upon the hypocritical Jews, whose religion consisted so much in external observances and keeping themselves from ceremonial defilements, when yet they were sullied with so many moral ones Matthew 23:23, John 18:28, James 1:14; and devoured widows’ houses.’ (Poole)

**Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world**. ‘There is a great deal of pure and faultless religion, in the sight of man, that is not **pure and faultless before God**.’ (Guzik)

What God is wanting is for followers of Jesus to show their gratitude and praise in simple, practical ways – by helping the needy and remaining unpolluted by the world’s corruption.

‘He does not deny the place of public worship (**2:2, 5:1-4**) or of religious observances, but he explains that in God’s sight a pure and faultless religion expresses itself in acts of charity and restraint – the two features of early Christian ethics which impressed the contemporary world.’ (Moffatt)

‘Charity and purity are the two great garments of Christianity.’ (Spurgeon)

**…keep oneself from being polluted by the world**. The Christian is not to retreat from the world, instead they are to be involved with those in need – **orphans and widows**. The Christian should be in the world, but not of it, so remaining unpolluted by it.

‘I would like to see a Christian, not kept in a glass case away from trial and temptation, but yet covered with an invisible shield, so that, wherever he went, he would be guarded and protected from the evil influences that are in the world in almost every place.’ (Spurgeon)

**James 2:1 - My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism. 2Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here’s a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ 4have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?**

**…believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.** James is talking about discrimination here when he says favouritism. He links us as believers with Jesus, who was never influenced by appearance or status. To show partiality is contrary to Scripture **Deuteronomy 10:17 (-20), Acts 10:34**.

If we take this letter as being one of the first written in the NT, James is writing that the earliest Christians considered Jesus to be God. Other translations interpret this verse as **The Lord of glory** in reference to Jesus, or **the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the divine Glory**. In regard to the latter, ‘The Christian religion [is here called] more explicitly **belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the divine Glory** – a striking term for Christ as the full manifestation of the divine presence and majesty. The Jews called this the *shekinah*.’ (Moffatt)

**…favouritism (partiality).** This was written in an age where equal rights were almost unheard of – society often operated ‘on prejudice and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. In the ancient world people were routinely and permanently categorised because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, or whatever.’ (Guzik) This also puts some of Paul’s writing into context.

**Suppose a man come into your meeting…** In the ancient Greek, the word **meeting** is literally *synagogue*, possibly indicating that he wrote before Gentiles were widely received into the church and the believers were Jewish converts. This is apparently the only place in the NT where a **meeting (assembly)** of Christians is clearly called a *synagogue*.

‘As Christians have no church-buildings at this period, their place of **meeting** was usually some large room in the house of a wealthy member or a hall hired for the purpose **Acts 19:9,** where outsiders were free to attend the ordinary services... They were to be welcomed, but without any servility or snobbery.’ (Moffatt)

**…gold ring and fine clothes…** James contrasts rich and poor. ‘In Roman society a sign of wealth was the wearing rings on the left hand. There were even shops in Rome where rings could be rented for special occasions.’ (Hiebert) **.a poor man in filthy old clothes…** This implies someone very poor, even a beggar.

**…have you not discriminated… and become judges with evil thoughts?** To favour one over another in such a way, is described as evil – taking the outward appearance as more important than the heart. **The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart 1 Samuel 16:9.**

To show **partiality** means we misunderstand who is important and blessed in God’s sight.

**James 2:5-7 - 5Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?**

**…has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom…**: God remains impartial – for Him, riches are often an obstacle to His Kingdom **Matthew 19:23-24** – He wants to bless everyone.

The poor are **chosen** in the sense that the poor more readily respond to God in faith, having fewer obstacles to the kingdom – God’s invitation is open to all.

‘We should remind ourselves that God also never calls for partiality against the rich. If one must judge in a dispute between a rich man and a poor man, they should let the law and the facts of the case decide the judgment instead of the economic class of those in the dispute.’ (Guzik)

**Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?** James reminds his readers that the rich often sin against them (**exploiting / dragging**), possibly motivated as recorded in **1 Timothy 6:10 …for the love of money is a root of every kinds of evil**.

**Are they not the ones who are blaspheming… ‘**If the rich here spoken of were Christians, then they may be said to blaspheme Christ’s name, when by their wicked carriage they caused it to be blasphemed by others... but if rich unbelievers be here meant, the rich men of those times being generally great enemies to Christianity.’ (Poole)

**James 2:8-9 - 8If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself,’ you are doing right. 9But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers.**

**If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture**: James anticipated that some of his readers might defend their partiality to the rich as simply loving the rich man as their neighbour in obedience to the law – the sin is in the favouritism.

**…the royal law…** God is Sovereign and it is His laws we need to abide by. Jesus emphasised God’s command from **Leviticus 19:18b** by stating it in **Matthew 22:36-40** – the poor man is just as much our **neighbour** as the rich man is.

**James 2:10-13 - 10For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11For he who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’also said, ‘You shall not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker. 12Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.**

**…whoever… stumbles at just one point, is guilty of breaking all…** James reminds us about being selective, choosing which commands of God should be obeyed and which can be safely disregarded. God cares about His laws in their entirety.

**Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom**… We are under the **law that gives freedom**, yet it still needs to be obeyed and it is the law by which we will be judged **2 Corinthians 5:10**.

**…judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.** We should refrain from favouritism/partiality (a sin), as the same mercy we show others will be extended to us again on the day of judgment. **For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged Matthew 7:2.**

**Mercy triumphs over judgment**. ‘The merciful life will triumph in the face of judgment.’ (Moffatt). Those who have been merciful in life, will receive mercy in the Heavenly kingdom.

**James 2:14 - 14What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?**

**What good is it,…** James’ belief is that no one can genuinely have a saving faith without deeds. Can the faith of someone who claims faith, but does not show good deeds, be real?

James’ audience is Christians from a Jewish background who have the glory of salvation by faith – they would have appreciated the freedom of not having to be ‘deeds-righteousness’, but some are possibly going to the other extreme, thinking that **deeds** didn’t matter at all.

**Can such faith save him?** James is not contradicting Paul’s teaching that we are not saved by works **Ephesians 2:9** – he is saying that the kind of faith that will save us is the kind from which deeds and works for God’s kingdom emerge. ‘…*faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone*; it has good works with it.’

**Ephesians 2:10 - For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

**Titus 3:8 - …those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.**

**James 2:15-17 - 15Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**

**Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food**. James is reducing human life to the absolute basics **Genesis 28:20, Matthew 6:25, 1 Timothy 6:8** and therefore, the basic level of relief or deeds that can be driven by our faith.

**…keep warmed and well fed**. The implication is that you know the person *needs* clothing and food, but all you offer is soothing words.

**…what good is it?** James says real faith will produce works that may include spiritual things, but will have a concern for the most basic needs – such as comfort, clothes and food.

**In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead**. James refers to a **dead** faith, so we must strive to have a living faith – the roof of which will be the works/deeds that come as a result. If we really believe in something we will follow through and act upon it. If we really put our trust and faith on Jesus, we will care for the things that concern Gd and that Jesus has told us to do.

**James 2:18-19 - 18But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.**

**You have faith; I have deeds**. James is teaching against two differing kinds of faith – one with a ‘gift’ of deeds and the other with a ‘gift’ of faith. We cannot say, ‘it’s okay for you to have your gift of works and that you care for the needy. But that isn’t my gift.’ Real faith will be demonstrated by Spirit-blessed works.

**Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by my deeds**: James says we can’t ‘see’ someone’s faith, but we can see the results of it – their deeds. The reality of a person’s faith will be in their deeds.

**You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder**. The proof of faith without works is demonstrated by the **demons**, who have a ‘faith’ in God, albeit a dead one. The demons **believe** as they acknowledge that God exists, but it will not benefit them eternally and is not producing Spirit-blessed works.

**James 2:20-24 - 20You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend. 24You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.**

**You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without works is useless?** James uses the OT to demonstrate that a living faith is required for salvation. Some translations have ‘dead’ instead of ‘useless’.

**Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?** Abraham was faithful long before he offered Isaac **Genesis 15:6**, but his obedience demonstrated that he really did trust God.

James is saying that despite the angel stooping Abraham, he had in effect offered Isaac on the altar – the act was complete. Abraham’s obedience meant he counted Isaac as dead.

**…his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did**. Faith and deeds/works/actions came together in Abraham and his faith was made complete in those actions. ‘Here is proof that faith cannot exist without being active in works of righteousness. His faith in God would have been of no use to him, had it not been shown by works.’ (Clarke)

**You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone**. True living faith will alone bring justification with God. ‘Works must accompany a genuine faith, because genuine faith is always connected with regeneration – being born again **2 Corinthians 5:17**. A genuine saving faith will bring evidence of a new life. ‘The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul.’ (Spurgeon)

**James 2:25-26 - 25In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.**

**Rahab the prostitute…** James now uses the example of Rahab to show living faith. It is speculated that by using Rahab (a Gentile), James is quietly rebuking the favouritism/partiality that may have developed on the part of Jewish Christians against the Gentile believers as they started to come into the church.

Rahab demonstrated her trust in God by hiding the spies and seeking salvation from their God **Joshua 2:8-13**. It was a living faith as it both believed in God and produced action

Abraham teaches us that if we believe in God, we will do what He tells us to do. Rahab teaches, if we believe in God, we will help His people, even when it costs us something.

**As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead**. ‘As much as you can have a body with no life (a corpse), so you can have a faith with no life – and faith without works is a **dead** faith, unable to save.

We can think of an apple tree; where is the life of the tree? It is in the root, and underneath the bark of the tree in the trunk. The life is not in the apples, the fruit that is displayed in season; but if the tree is alive it will produce apples in season.’ (Guzik)